



Aruba's Police Force encourages local barrios to become active in protecting their neighborhoods

Though a small island, Aruba still consists of many neighborhoods, traditionally called *barrios*. Each of these barrios have a community center, which is a focal point for the adults and children, often being home to after school care programs or preschool centers for the children of working parents.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Trudy Hassel visited the centers of San Nicholas on Monday evening and Centro di Barrio Playa Pabao on the outskirts of Oranjestad, on Tuesday evening to outline a plan by the Community Police to citizens from those areas. The purpose of the meeting was also two fold, giving the local residents an opportunity to not only become acquainted with the new program, but to also receive their input and concerns as to what is needed to maintain the peaceful lifestyle to which Aruba is accustomed.

Deputy Commissioner Hassel outlined a three-point plan that had short, medium, and long-term goals stretching out over the next five years. The emphasis of the plan is community involvement, a partnership of the residents and the community police to see to it that barrios are cleaner and safe, and that the island's youth are encouraged to more healthy pursuits.

The first part of the program is for immediate action over the next four months, and entails the recruitment of parents and community members in a youth program that will watch out for individuals coming into the area selling illegal substances or tempting impressionable youth with negative behavior.

The second leg of the program will incorporate a census of sorts, so that Community Police are aware of neighborhood residents, the sick, and the elderly that need assistance and homes with children and youth that need supervision. This is expected to begin in about five months and to complete in a year.

The final phase beginning in approximately one year and taking place over five years is the establishment of programs and activities for children and youth that will allow for positive pastimes. Classes in art and music, sports activities and whatever other programs the community centers can organize, or members have the skills to conduct are encouraged. This, Deputy Commissioner Hassel pointed out, will require the most involvement by the community residents and requested them to volunteer their time to help make a better future for the island's youth. Eventually, they hope to see a dialogue between the different barrios, assisting each other in accomplishing these goals.

Playa Pabao is one of the most active community centers on the island, sponsoring weekend and holiday activities, and having a playground and various sports fields on site. The meeting hall was filled with individuals that voiced their concerns over what they felt needed to be done, and there was a lively exchange. The meeting ended with a presentation and plan in regards to illegal dumping in the area, and all the community coming out to lend a hand during the island wide clean up that will take place over the next four Saturdays. Community members feel this is an excellent opportunity for residents of the barrio to not only dispose of refuse from their own property, but to also clean up the entire neighborhood, and steps have been taken to gain the cooperation of local vendors in providing garbage bags and refreshments.

The final point of the meeting applied to not only the future of the community, but also to keeping it clean, residents must not shirk their own personal responsibility in maintaining their neighborhoods. Trudy Hassell pointed out that "It comes down to the individual; each one of us doing their part to see that Aruba remains the wonderful place where we live, and not only complaining about the government or police not doing the job. It will only succeed if there is a community effort."